

Project Description

The Problem We Are Trying to Solve

The City of Ecotopia, population 30,000, sits on the edge of Puget Sound. State Route 775 crosses through the city and connects with a Washington State Ferry Terminal. The terminal is a busy one, with 40 boat crossings per day.

The state highway effectively divides the city in two, as it traverses directly through the heart of the downtown area. It isolates the major downtown core from the city's waterfront area. There is no pedestrian access linking the downtown with the waterfront area, which includes a marina, shops, a promenade, and several art galleries. Compounding the problem is a Burlington Northern rail line, which also serves as a formidable barrier between the downtown and the waterfront area. There are no pedestrian crossings that allow for passage across the tracks; bicyclists and pedestrians need to wait at the train signal and then cross the tracks along with vehicular traffic.

The state highway and ferry terminal waiting area are inadequate to meet WSDOT's needs. During summer months the entire vehicular holding area quickly becomes filled, resulting in long lines of traffic backed up and parked on the state highway. In addition to safety concerns, this situation has resulted in a substantial increase in air pollution throughout the surrounding neighborhoods.

In its comprehensive planning process, the City of Ecotopia set as its visioning goal the notion of being a "destination city" noted for its art galleries and waterfront. An improved link to the downtown area is crucial to this vision and to the overall economic vitality of the city. Ecotopia residents are also pressing for this link, as it would improve their overall quality of life in the city.

WSDOT also needs to improve the situation as the current holding area and resulting traffic backups are both intolerable and unsafe for motorists. The agency has a cost estimate in its Highway System Plan for anticipated improvements, but it's clear that further study is needed.

Alternatives Under Consideration

The project team is considering several possible alternatives to solve this problem:

- 1. Move the highway corridor.** This would also require that the ferry terminal be relocated. While this is an expensive alternative, it would enable WSDOT to construct the necessary highway and holding area improvements that would allow the corridor and the ferry terminal to function effectively. This would also free up the existing corridor for the bike and pedestrian improvements that could more effectively link the downtown core area with the city's waterfront.
- 2. Rehabilitate the existing highway and holding area.** This is a lower-cost alternative. It would require that the holding area be expanded significantly and that a system of pedestrian overpasses be constructed to link the area with downtown, provide safe passage to the waterfront, and create the downtown-waterfront link that is vital for the city's long-term economic success.
- 3. Make a series of local improvements.** The City of Ecotopia could modify operational characteristics or close some existing roadways and construct other improvements that could also work to alleviate congestion in the area.

How Project Success Will Be Defined

The Ecotopia terminal-corridor alignment project will only be deemed successful if the following project goals are achieved:

- Provide sufficient capacity for the ferry terminal and state highway, so that vehicular growth can be accommodated through 2050.
- Provide for the safety of motorists who are both traveling to and waiting at the ferry terminal including appropriate lane designations, crossing aids, and services.
- Decrease current levels of carbon monoxide to levels that are safe for the health and well-being of Ecotopia's residents.
- Provide for an effective, economically-viable link between the downtown core and the city's waterfront including safe pedestrian and bicycle access across the highway corridor and the railroad tracks, pleasing landscaping that effectively draws the visitor between both of these areas, and signage and other aids that enable the visitor to readily navigate between both areas of the city.